DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 339 648 SO 021 515

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TITLE MACOS and the Global Perspective.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 7p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cultural Differences; *Curriculum Evaluation; Educational Philosophy; Elementary Education; Elementary School Curriculum; Foreign Culture; *Global Approach; Interdisciplinary Approach; Moral Values; Multicultural Education; *Social Studies; Student Educational Objectives
IDENTIFIERS *Global Education; *Man A Course of Study

ABSTRACT

The contributions that the elementary curriculum, "Man: A Course of Study" (MACOS), has made to global education are examined in this essay. It is contended that MACOS, which incorporates ecology, biology, anthropology, and the humanities, has fostered several goals of global education. These goals include: understanding cultures through an in-depth study of them; developing a vocabulary of thought for dealing with cross-cultural similarities and differences; and attaining a non-judgmental framework for dealing with issues of value. In short, MACOS is committed to helping students to grasp the interconnectedness of the world. (DB)

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MACOS AND THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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MACOS AND THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Peter B. Dow

"When you fragment knowledge, you mutilate education."
Doug Smith, 5th Grade Teacher
Glendale Elementary School
North Tonawanda, New York

What a year it has been for the globally-minded educator since we last met at SSEC! World events are moving more rapidly than even we believers in cross-cultural communication can comprehend. Is it true, as Mikhail Gorbachev has recently proclaimed, that the Cold War is really over? These are interesting times to reflect upon what we might learn from the globally-oriented projects of the sixties. In my brief formal remarks, let me first try to summarize what I think MACOS contributed to global education. Then I will suggest some topics we might add if we were doing it today, and close with a more general point.

As MACOS defined it, global education is at its most basic level the cultivation of an understanding of, and sensitivity to, cultures very different from our own. The course tried to do accomplish this exposing students in detail to the traditional folkways of the Netsilik Eskimo. By studying the Netsilik way of life in great depth, and by introducing them to the intimate details of the life of a single family, we hoped that our students would begin to identify with the Netsilik experience. It is a harsh and demanding life, and I cannot say they we succeeded in achieving empathy for arctic living with most children, but they learned that traditional Inuit culture "made sense" in human terms. They may not have grown to love them, but they came to respect the Netsilik as fellow human beings.

Beyond this, MACOS sought to foster a global perspective on human behavior by introducing a vocabulary and conceptual framework for considering cross-cultural differences. We asked them to think about broad topics like technology, social organization, language, belief systems, and child rearing, and thus helped

them to see particular cultural practices as examples of behaviors that characterized a common species. To reinforce this species consciousness we contrasted humans with other animals, both closely related ones like baboons and chimps, and more distant ones like herring gulls and salmon, thus emphasizing the special nature of our dependence on language, on group organization, and on learned behavior. The acceptance of all human beings as genetic equals turns out to be a difficult conceptual leap for many teachers as well as students, but MACOS was deeply committed to the transmission of this idea.

MACOS also recognized that global sensitivity requires more than a conceptual appreciation of cultural differences, and an intellectual awareness of the common humanity that all human beings share. It involves a level of moral development that accepts the humanity of others even though they may not share many of our beliefs and behaviors. With this in mind we spent a good deal of time examining the role that values play in cultural adaptation, and helping students to perceive that values that differ from our own may be highly functional in another context. Sharing among the Netsilik, for example, may as be as important for their survival as competition is among ourselves; and the suppression of aggression may be as adaptive for them as the expression of aggression may be for us. The ability to separate value differences from value judgments was a crucial objective of the MACOS program, although again, we were only partly successful.

But the achievement of our objectives may be less important for our discussion today, than the framing of them. The three that I have stated: understanding other cultures through in-depth study of them; developing a vocabulary of thought for dealing with cross-cultural similarities and differences; and cultivating a non-judgmental framework for dealing with issues of value, remain, I believe, crucial goals for global studies.

To the above I would add another perspective or two that were less fully developed in MACOS, but which seem me to be central to the current concern for global education. The first is *caring about the Globe*. We are all more conscious than we were in the sixties about the fragility of the global environment. Perhaps the first dramatic image that raised the collective consciousness was that beautiful NASA photograph taken on the first moon mission which revealed the incredibly thin atmospheric layer surrounding the Earth that sustains human life. It was startling to learn a few years later that we were destroying the ozone layer through the use of apparently innocent devices like aerosol sprays. Such discoveries have led us to probe with increasing intensity the unforeseen consequences of our scientific and technological achievements. The incalculable human and environmental tragedy wrought by industrial pollution behind the iron curtain is but the latest of these startling revelations. MACOS touched on these matters peripherally by examining both the costs as well as benefits of modernization among the Netsilik. If we were developing the course today we would certainly give much greater attention to the world-wide environmental consequences of technological development, and we would strive for an even closer integration of the natural and social sciences to illuminate these issues. As Carl Sagan recently remarked, "Molecules do not respect international boundaries."

Another issue that we only briefly addressed in MACOS was the extraordinary possibilities that now exist for for global communication. A story or two will illustrate my point. When we started MACOS, we sought to use the latest technology, which was at that time the hand-held, sound synchronous movie camera, to bring remote parts of the world to the classroom. (This, you may remember, was in the days before the Xerox machine!) Today things are a bit different. The other day I had the privilege of visiting a fifth grade teacher in a Buffalo suburb who has become something of a local celebrity by rigging his class-room with a computer-

activated short-wave radio system that enables him to receive downlink transmissions from the Space Shuttle. He has taught his students how to track satellites, tune in on ham radio broadcasts from around the world, and on at least one occasion they have transmitted messages to a Russian space mission. These children are practicing global studies on an impressive scale.

And he is not alone. The last class of MACOS kids I talked with a few years ago insisted on visiting an Inuit village to learn first-hand how Eskimos live today. They raised part of the money themselves, got the school to kick in some environmental education funds, and chartered a cargo plane to fly them to a remote Baffin Island community on the edge of the Arctic circle where they feasted on caribou stew, built igloos, went to school, and lived in Inuit families for a week. Even I have been caught up in this modern day educational communimania. A few weeks ago I started exploring the possibility of equipping a Buffalo elementary school with equipment which will permit real time transmissions from Robert Ballard's undersea explorations, allow students to communicate by satellite with the local science museum's archaeological dig on the West Coast, and, if they ever get it working, examine celestial data gathered by the Hubble telescope.

One final point. Global education is, in a metaphorical sense, an invitation to return to *interconnectedness* as a way of organizing instruction. Its an old idea. Dewey preached it. It was a fundamental part of the "central subject" approach pioneered by Shady Hill and the other progressive schools of the early part of the century. Maria Montessori designed it into her conception of a social studies curriculum. And the great German educator, Rudolph Steiner, used this approach in his Waldorf schools. Doug Smith, the fifth grade teacher who has the ham radio set-up in his classroom, deeply believes in it. I asked him if he had ever considered becoming a specialist who taught science to children exclusively, and he said, "I thought about it but rejected the idea." When I asked him why, he replied,

"I enjoy helping children see how all of their subjects interrela e. When you fragment knowledge, you mutilate education."

Interconnectedness. Isn't that what gives meaning to education for most of us? The recognition that there is a relationship between what we know and what we don't know, whatever the discipline? That "things cohere?" Perhaps we are coming to the end of a long educational history that relies exclusively on taking things apart to understand them. Of dissecting things to learn how they work. Of fragmenting knowledge, to use Doug Smith's term. There is a place for fragmentation in education. Many things are best understood by disassembling them into their basic elements. When I was in school we talked about atoms as the smallest bits. Now we talk about quarks. When we have the superconducting supercollider, who knows what we will be talking about. Reductionism is respectable in research. But global education emphasizes another educational value: putting things together. Seeing interrelationships. Grasping the basic similarities that underlie surface differences. Understanding our own condition as part of a global system.

MACOS was committed to pursuing this interconnectedness. The course was consciously designed to to draw together insights from a variety of disciplines. It set about to illuminate the nature of human nature, to see the relationship between human beings and the environment of which they are a part, and to cultivate an understanding of the meaning of values. It was ecology, biology, ethology, anthropology, and a bit of the humanities all rolled into one. It taught children that we learn, not just to know the facts and concepts, but to grasp who we are, and where we fit in the larger scheme of things. It sought understanding of the human condition in order to better the human condition. In this sense MACOS and global education shared a common purpose.